

3-23-2001

## Falling Dominoes in 2001: Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction

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### Recommended Citation

Editor (2001) "Falling Dominoes in 2001: Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 10 : Iss. 10 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol10/iss10/4>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Falling Dominoes in 2001: Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Author: Editor

Volume: 10

Issue: 10

Date: 2001-03-23

Keywords: Dominoes, Inevitability, Nuclear Weapons, Weapons of Mass Destruction

**Abstract.** This article describes psychologies of inevitability and their foundations pertaining to nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

During the Cold War, United States (US) national security officials labeled as "hawks" cited the gospel of a domino theory. In its most radical incarnation, the theory impelled the dire necessity to not only contain but roll back any Communist initiative anywhere at any time. The consequence of not doing this would be a succession of successful Communist initiatives (one domino falling after another) eventually leading to "world victory"--today it would be global victory--for Communism. Often implied in this theoretical take on the world were other inevitabilities: e.g., (1) uncontesting an initiative or success always led to a detriment in one's other-perceived prestige and formidability and (2) following any cooperative venture with a Communist entity always led to others perceiving one to be weak. One upshot of this theory was the seemingly necessary, inevitable, and disastrous policy decision for the US Government (USG) to significantly engage Communist forces in Vietnam.

Nowadays, it is a segment of opponents of USG national security officials being accused of setting dominoes in motion. These opponents of USG initiatives for ballistic missile defense--both theatre and national--claim that decisions to develop and field such defenses will inevitably lead other nuclear powers to increase the number and quality of their own nuclear weapons. These opponents also claim that the USG initiatives also will inevitably lead to non-nuclear political entities with and without chemical and biological warfare assets developing and/or upgrading missile-borne threats before ballistic missile defense is fully fielded. As well, they claim that the initiatives will fatally harm USG relations with allies--this last assertion already becoming disconfirmed by the ongoing discourse of public diplomacy.

One might posit that domino theories possess and retain part of their attraction by their ready resolution of an alternative nexus of theories suggesting an unpredictable and even meaningless world. Unfortunately, such terror management often begets terror through instigating attack, defending no defense against attack, or other problematic consequences. And so les jeux sont fait. (See Bosman, J. (1987). Persuasive effects of political metaphors. *Metaphor & Symbolic Activity*, 2, 97-113; Glad, B., & Taber, C.S. (1990). Images, learning, and the decision to use force: The domino theory of the United States. In B. Glad (Ed.). *Psychological dimensions of war*. (pp. 56-81). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc; Gordon, M.R. (March 19, 2001). Bush is due to meet Chinese on crucial Issues. *The New York Times*, pp. A1; A8; Kanwisher, N. (1989). Cognitive heuristics and American security policy. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 33, 652-675; Mio, J.S. (1997). Metaphor and politics. *Metaphor & Symbol*, 12, 113-133; Shimko, K.L. (1994). Metaphors and foreign policy decision-making. *Political Psychology*, 15, 655-671.) (Keywords: Dominoes, Inevitability, Nuclear Weapons, Weapons of Mass Destruction.)